

Pakistan. This bill supports President Obama's new direction in addressing these priorities. In June, our military redeployed from Iraq's cities under the Status of Forces Agreement concluded by the government of Iraq and the previous administration. The Iraqis must continue to take responsibility for their own future.

I commend the President's increased focus on defense and development in Afghanistan; preventing the reemergence of the Taliban and al-Qaida; and strengthening economic, agricultural, educational, and democratic development. These goals are important to development in Afghanistan, but they are essential to our military's strategy. I support the National Defense Authorization Act and commend Chairman LEVIN and Senator MCCAIN for their leadership.

Almost 3,000 soldiers from the Illinois Army National Guard are currently deployed to Afghanistan. Members of the Illinois Guard's 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team are helping train the Afghan National Police and providing force protection at military bases. It has been a difficult deployment, with many casualties. Gen William Enyart, the Adjutant General of Illinois, has had to attend the funerals of too many of his soldiers. He sent me an article he had written this spring. Why do the young soldiers serve, he asked? This is what he wrote. They serve because:

They are our kids, they are our protectors. They are what stand between us and chaos. They don't have to be asked to serve. They don't have to be asked to go into danger. They do it, not out of hate, not out of vengeance, but out of love. Love of family, love of community, love of fellow soldier.

I think he is right. Members of the Armed Forces and their families make these sacrifices to keep our country safe. We owe them much in return. This bill takes one step by providing them the resources they need. I ask my colleagues to support this legislation and to send it to the President for his signature.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senator HATCH to be recognized for 15 minutes, then Senator MURRAY for 8 minutes, then Senator BURRIS for 6 minutes, and Senator BROWN for 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, there will be, then, no more amendments we will be able to take up tonight on the Defense authorization bill. We will pick up that bill tomorrow.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

GUANTANAMO BAY

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I rise to express my concerns about the administration's failure to make the deadline of issuing a report on the Guantanamo detainee policy. Today's deadline, similar to the January 2010 closure deadline, was self-imposed. It concerns me that the administration maintains that closure will occur even though the execution of this process has been less than stellar.

In January, on his very first full day in office, President Obama signed the order to close the Guantanamo Bay detention facility in 12 months. The President created separate task forces to examine closure and detainee issues. These task forces were developed and staffed by the Obama administration to achieve successful closure in 1 year. The product of this review is to include a report on a broader detainee policy.

Today marks the first deadline in this process. It was set to be the date of release and publication of the task force report on a broader detainee policy going forward. The administration's failure to meet the deadline appears to me to be the "canary in the coal mine" that a January closure of Guantanamo without a detailed plan is an exercise in futility.

Yet the White House downplays the missed deadline and publicly states that the January closure is still on track. Is it? Despite not having a plan and missing a deadline for a key integral part of the closure process, the administration claims it can still meet the overall deadline of closure by January 1. I find that notion suspect at best and completely absurd at worst.

In May, a Gallup Poll indicated that 65 percent—65 percent—of Americans oppose the closure of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility. Even so, the administration intends to follow its timeline and close Guantanamo by January 2010. The task force examining the cases of the remaining 229 detainees has only reviewed half the necessary caseload thus far.

The Justice Department hopes to complete its review by an October reporting deadline, but that benchmark is quickly slipping away too. This review process has taken twice the amount of time the administration thought it would take. Yet keeping Guantanamo open beyond January is inexplicably still not an option in the administration's view.

Recently, media reports are circulating that the administration's Guantanamo closure plan has been fraught with political miscalculation and internal dissension. Moreover, the complex nature of this issue will undoubtedly force the transfer of detainees inside the United States. Since the announcement of the President's intention to close Guantanamo, I have joined other Senators in pointing out the lack of planning and clear miscalculation of this decision. That pool has grown and a groundswell of bipartisan support is signaling the White House to "pump the brakes."

In May, the Senate voted 90 to 6 to strip out funding in the fiscal year 2010 war spending request that would authorize \$80 million for the transfer of detainees to the interior of the United States of America. Now that the failure to meet this deadline has been reported by outlets such as the Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, and New York Times, the administration still does not get it. Senior administration officials are letting hubris get in the way. This is neither the proper manner nor the time to close Guantanamo.

There should have been more study of this issue prior to setting us on a course for closure. It is easy to say that Guantanamo can be closed when you are a candidate for President. It is even easier to sign an order on your very first full day in office as President that says in 12 months Guantanamo will close. What is hard is taking a deliberative, methodical approach and then formulating the proper plan to balance the safety of this country with the needs of lawful detention. Had the administration conducted a careful and thorough review of this issue, the conclusion would have been that Guantanamo fulfills both requirements. Instead, the administration has painted itself into a corner.

Clearly, the administration miscalculated and underestimated the depth and breadth of this issue. From the onset, the administration has tried to reverse-engineer the process for closing Guantanamo—starting from the end and working backward. If changes are not made immediately, administration officials will force this issue on American cities and towns in just 185 days. They will limp across the finish line. We have 185 days until Guantanamo is closed. The days until the plan is released ARE a big question mark. They are going to limp across the finish line on January 22, 2010, and herald their accomplishments a victory despite its ill-conceived planning and three stooges-like manner of execution.

Guantanamo is still an asset to this country. It complies with international treaties and exceeds the standards of domestic corrections facilities. I don't see how anyone who is honest about this matter can characterize it in any other way, especially when there is not a sufficient replacement located domestically to meet the Justice Department's needs. It is my fervent hope that the President and Attorney General will reconsider their ill-considered plan to close Guantanamo and recognize the obvious, that a \$200 million facility that is already operational and in compliance with international treaties should not be shuttered.

This is an important issue. I don't think the American people are going to stand to have these very dangerous people brought on shore to our country when we have a \$200 million facility that meets international treaty obligations sitting there doing the job. I think the administration needs to get

this work done and needs to get it done the right way.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. (Mr. UDALL of Colorado). The Senator from Washington is recognized.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, 3 weeks ago I sent a letter to families across my home State of Washington asking for their help as we reform our broken health care system. I told them I wanted to pass a plan that protects existing coverage when it is good, improves it when it is not, and guarantees care for the millions who have none. I asked them to share their stories with me and ideas about how to make this vision a reality. I told them that I know health care is a very personal issue, but also that personal stories have the power to change minds and transform debates. The response to my request has been simply overwhelming.

I wish to share some of the stories that have been pouring into my office—over 5,000 so far—because they underscore not only the desperate need to fix our broken health care system but also the dire necessity to get it done this year.

For too many families today, health care reform can't wait. I wish to share a story from a letter I received from Rita from Seattle who sent me a story about her sister Janet. Janet was unemployed and had lost her health insurance when her throat began to hurt one day back in 2004. She paid out of her own pocket to visit a health clinic and was sent home with antibiotics. Well, weeks later, she was still in a lot of pain and finally managed to get an appointment with a specialist, but she was told she had to wait 6 weeks more to come in to get help. Only after begging them for an appointment was she seen by the specialist 3 days later and was told that the pain she had been living with was in the late stages of an aggressive form of throat cancer. Janet died not long after that. It was a death that would have been prevented had she been able to see a specialist earlier.

Janet is not alone. A woman by the name of Kathleen from Puyallup, WA, sent in a story about her friend Kelly. Kelly had just been laid off from work when she came down with what she thought was the flu. She didn't have any health insurance because she had been laid off from her job and she couldn't afford to go to the doctor, so she waited. Two weeks later she felt even worse, so she finally made an appointment to go in for a checkup. Kelly never made it to the doctor. Her 7-year-old son found her dead on the couch on the morning she was supposed to go in. She died from an untreated ovarian cyst. Because Kelly didn't have health insurance, that little boy no longer has a mother.

I think the fact that these stories are possible in the greatest and richest

country in the world is simply shameful. No son should lose a mother simply because she can't afford care. No family should have to watch a loved one suffer because insurance companies instead of doctors are making the decisions. That is why we so badly need to reform our health care system this year.

Our country has been working on this issue for over 60 years and we have spent months and months this session alone working to put together a reform package that works for all Americans. We have had over 6 months of hearings. We went through over 50 hours of public markups. We debated over 200 amendments. So when I hear some of my colleagues from across the aisle saying we should slow down, saying we should take more time, or that we are trying to reform health care too fast, and when I see some of them shrugging off every attempt we have made at engaging them and bringing them into the process, I think of Kelly and I think of Janet and I think of all of the families out there right now with sick husbands or sick wives or sick kids. I think of all the small business owners I have talked to who can't cover their employees. I think of the people who have coverage, but are worried about losing it today in this uncertain economy. I think about all the working Americans who are paying a hidden tax today in the form of rising premiums in order to cover those Americans who don't have access to care. As a mother and as a Senator, I say enough is enough.

Yesterday we heard some pretty ugly and blatant rhetoric. One Member of the Senate who wants to protect the status quo, who doesn't want to make any changes, said: "If we're able to stop Obama on this, it will be his Waterloo. It will break him."

That is playing games with real lives in order to score cheap political points. Bucking health care reform isn't going to break the President of the United States. It will break American families. It will break American businesses. It is going to break the bank.

Americans deserve better. The families of Janet and Kelly and the thousands of others who have written me deserve better. We can't play politics with what is most important to our Nation's families—the health of their loved ones.

They say justice delayed is justice denied. Well, health care delayed is often health care denied. It was denied to Kelly, it was denied to Janet, and it gets denied to more Americans every single day we wait.

I call on all of our colleagues here in the Senate to work with us to rise above partisanship. We have a good plan right now. We are working to listen and bring everybody in and make it better. It will rein in the costs with the goal of lowering them across the long term. It will make sure all Americans have high quality, affordable coverage.

This issue is not going to go away if we don't do anything. It is not going to

get better or easier if we wait. In fact, today, costs are rising at an unsustainable rate for those who do have insurance and more and more Americans are losing their insurance every day.

We have been talking about reforming the health care system for a very long time. I go home to my home State of Washington every weekend, and I am asked often now if it is the right time to tackle health care reform. In these difficult and challenging economic times when people are worried about paying their bills, worried about losing their jobs, worried about what is coming around the corner, they ask me if we are biting off more than we can chew. I tell them: This is exactly the time we need to act. Premiums are rising three times faster than wages today. Every day, 14,000 more Americans lose their health insurance. In these already difficult times, I don't want to add losing health insurance to the list of concerns our families have to deal with every day.

We know the current system is unsustainable. Even those people with good coverage today are faced with massive costs and rising premiums. That is why tackling this problem now has to be part of our long-term economic recovery program.

Without health care reform, family budgets are going to continue to be strapped, more Americans are going to lose their care, and we are going to hear more stories like Janet and Kelly. I hope we can put aside the partisan rhetoric, I hope we can put aside the talk of: Slow this down; it is too fast. This issue is imperative, and I urge my colleagues to act.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

CONCEALED CARRY RECIPROCITY

Mr. BURRIS. Mr. President, I rise today to express my strong opposition to Senator THUNE's amendment regarding concealed carry reciprocity. This legislation ignores the explosion of gun crime plaguing America's cities and putting an unnecessary burden on local law enforcement.

In my home State of Illinois, an entire generation of young people, many of whom live in urban areas, is being decimated with gun violence. On May 10 of 2007, a 16-year-old honor student named Blair Holt was shot to death while riding a Chicago city bus. When the shooter opened fire, Blair was shot while protecting a young girl with whom he was riding. The shooter was also a 16-year-old boy and an admitted member of the Gangster Disciples national street gang. Just the other day, justice was presented to him when he was given 100 years in prison by the judge.

Similar tragic stories have only grown more frequent. In the first 6 months of 2009, Chicago alone logged 202 homicides, 84 percent of whom were